

## Warp's music videos: affective communities, genre, and gender in electronic/dance music's visual aesthetic

Article (Accepted Version)

Haddon, Mimi (2019) Warp's music videos: affective communities, genre, and gender in electronic/dance music's visual aesthetic. *Journal of British Cinema and Television*, 16 (4). pp. 571-590. ISSN 1743-4521

This version is available from Sussex Research Online: <http://sro.sussex.ac.uk/id/eprint/67710/>

This document is made available in accordance with publisher policies and may differ from the published version or from the version of record. If you wish to cite this item you are advised to consult the publisher's version. Please see the URL above for details on accessing the published version.

### **Copyright and reuse:**

Sussex Research Online is a digital repository of the research output of the University.

Copyright and all moral rights to the version of the paper presented here belong to the individual author(s) and/or other copyright owners. To the extent reasonable and practicable, the material made available in SRO has been checked for eligibility before being made available.

Copies of full text items generally can be reproduced, displayed or performed and given to third parties in any format or medium for personal research or study, educational, or not-for-profit purposes without prior permission or charge, provided that the authors, title and full bibliographic details are credited, a hyperlink and/or URL is given for the original metadata page and the content is not changed in any way.

# **Warp's Music Videos: Affective Communities, Genre, and Gender in Electronic/Dance Music's Visual Aesthetic**

**Dr. Mimi Haddon**

**University of Sussex**

## **Introduction**

The Warp Records label emerged out of the early electronic/dance music scene in Sheffield, UK in 1989, and has since become one of the UK's most critically acclaimed independent music labels, boasting electronic/dance music artists such as Aphex Twin, Squarepusher, Autechre, and Broadcast at the core of its catalogue.<sup>1</sup> The music videos Warp commissions are highly regarded, particularly those from the mid- to late-1990s, the so-called 'golden age' of British music video (Caston 2012). Directors such as Chris Cunningham, David Slade, Alex Rutterford, and Jarvis Cocker are amongst the most well-known names associated with Warp's videos from that time, and Cunningham's videos for the Aphex Twin tracks 'Come to Daddy' (1997) and 'Windowlicker' (1999) are perhaps the label's most famous. Since its inception Warp has sought innovative ways of sourcing directing talent, giving fans and young directors the opportunity to make promos, and has collaborated with broadcasters such as [adult swim] to hone its audience.<sup>2</sup> As Emily Caston notes, Warp is an exceptional case in the history of British music video since, unlike other labels, it released a DVD (2004) of music videos under its own name, rather than by artists or directors (Caston 2015: 156).<sup>3</sup>

This article focuses primarily on Warp's electronic/dance music videos. I employ archival sources and interviews with Warp's management and creatives to provide an overview of the label's videos and to interrogate their generic and social identity. I adopt an interdisciplinary approach, combining methods from popular music studies, film and production studies, and communication studies. The first section concerns the conditions for

the emergence of Warp's music videos, exploring the connections made through informal networks, 'affective alliances' (Grossberg 1984), shared cult interests, and instances of change in the label's approach to commissioning. In the second section I discuss the videos' musical and visual aesthetics, examining the extent to which Warp has a 'house style.' Here I respond to work by Carol Vernallis (2013), arguing that any identifiable 'house style' in Warp's videos relates to issues of genre, identity, and the formation of 'affective communities' (Driver and Bennett 2015: 101; Frith 1981: 166-7). In the final section, I explore questions of genre and identity in more detail, seeking to problematise the appearance of Warp as a male-gendered label associated primarily with electronic/dance music. I consider the interplay between what Georgina Born calls the micro- and macro socialities of cultural practice and experience (Born 2011: 376), examining Warp's videos at a micro social level to reveal gendered labour practices.

### **Originary Networks, Scenes, and Affective Alliances**

According to first-hand accounts, Sheffield's early electronic/dance music scene was characterised by both musical and racial diversity, and many of the artefacts produced there resulted from informal collaborations. Important loci in the scene included clubs such as Kiki's, Occasions, and the club night known as Jive Turkey, DJed by DJ Parrot (Richard Barrett) and Winston Hazel. In a 2013 interview published on the website *DJhistory.com*, DJ Parrot describes Jive Turkey as 'a mecca for what was left in terms of good, mixed, eclectic black music: soul, funk, jazz, disco' and electro, a place notable for its mix of black and white attendees (Brewster 2005, n.p.). The Warp label might be understood as a niche or 'microscene' within this more generalised and diverse scene (for 'niche' see Straw 2014: 18-20; for 'microscene' see Grazian 2013).<sup>4</sup> Warp was established by the university friends

Steve Beckett and Rob Mitchell, and producer Rob Gordon. Both Beckett and Mitchell worked at FON, a record shop located on Sheffield's Division Street that opened in 1987.<sup>5</sup> Using money they'd acquired selling Sheffield University concert tickets, Beckett, Mitchell, and Gordon eventually turned the FON shop into Warp Records and began to specialise in selling imports from the big house and techno cities of Chicago and Detroit. Alongside events such as Jive Turkey, FON served as an integral node in what has more recently been labeled the 'South Yorkshire bleep scene' of the late 1980s and early 1990s (Collins et al. 2013: 109).<sup>6</sup>

Informal networks and DIY production strategies underscored Warp's early work as a label and in music video. These strategies involved exploiting existing informal networks and forming affective alliances, that is, connections made between diverse groups of individuals based on a shared affective enthusiasm for a genre, track, or artist (Grossberg 1984: 46-7; Straw 1991: 374). Warp's first music video was for the track 'Testone' by the Sheffield-based duo Sweet Exorcist, released in 1990. The track was made specifically for Warp by DJ Parrot and Richard Kirk, and Martin Wallace and Jarvis Cocker directed its video. The visual motifs used in the video anticipate the 'house style' that characterises Warp later in the decade. The video includes footage from the early arcade games *Pong* and *Space Invaders*, as well as distorted dancing bodies, heads floating in outer space, and the girl from the BBC test card coming to life and working 'behind the scenes' by twiddling knobs and playing with what look like patch cords.

When I asked Beckett about the genesis of Warp's early videos, he emphasised their haphazard nature and dependence on Sheffield's nightlife. With reference to 'Testone' he recalled attending parties hosted by Cocker and the band Pulp:

Jarvis was a friend of ours so we'd be in a whole scene of artists and musicians and things like that, so they'd know that we'd set this label up. And we'd be like 'Oh can you make a video for this crazy Testone track?' or whatever it was. And then he'd come up with some ideas. And then go away and do it. It was as simple as that in those days ... like no budget, not even a few hundred pounds (Beckett 2016: n.p.).

Similarly, music video director Dawn Shadforth—who directed the Warp documentary *Seven Year Glitch* (1996) and 'Outta Space' (1998) for Jimi Tenor—described the early Sheffield scene as small but with cross-collaboration amongst individual sub-scenes:

It's such a small city. But if you're interested in a certain type of music there was pretty much one place to go ... Like I used to go to Occasions nightclub and listen to Parrot, Pipes, Winston, and those DJs and just through being interested in a certain kind of music I met everyone who was really involved with making music. And I lived with Roisin Murphy ... Neither of us were specifically connected to Warp but I knew Steve Beckett. I knew a lot of the people, Chantal [Mira Calix] ...

It was just a melting pot of taste and influences at that time. Of which Warp was one part. But Warp was always slightly separate ... (Shadforth 2016: n.p.)

Beckett's and Shadforth's memories of Sheffield's electronic/dance music scene in the early 1990s present Warp as a niche within a more general scene and the early videos emerged informally via connections therein. In fact, the DIY quality was an aspect of Warp's videos that won them critical acclaim early on. In September 1994 the City Music Media Awards nominated Cocker's 1993 video for Aphex Twin's 'On' in the category of Best Low Budget Promo (*Promo* Sept/Oct 1994: 7). Cocker's 'On' indeed shows many of the hallmarks

of a ‘budget’ video; its stop-motion style and foregrounding of tools and equipment (scissors, cut-outs) lends it a conspicuously DIY, art-school aesthetic.

As Warp developed as a company its process for commissioning music videos perhaps inevitably became more formalised and Warp no longer employed primarily friends such as Cocker and Wallace. Instead they began sourcing directors from artists they’d seen or read about, or from samples of work sent to Warp’s headquarters (Beckett 2016: n.p.). Yet shared cultural interests and ‘affective alliances’ continued to play an integral role. According to Beckett the informal network of connections tended to yield ‘better results’ than the formal commissioning process (Beckett 2016: n.p.). Video directors David Slade and Chris Cunningham, both integral to sculpting Warp’s identity in the mid/late-1990s and whose work received the most attention in the British music video magazine *Promo* at that time, came to Warp through the channels of shared cultural interests.<sup>7</sup>

According to Beckett, Slade was a customer at FON and Beckett was familiar with his work as an illustrator. Warp aimed to harness Slade’s potential for their music videos. Beckett suggested, ‘a lot of the time, it’s [about] getting with these people quite early on and seeing if they can make something with a broader remit than what they’re already doing’ (Beckett 2016: n.p.). Warp’s connection with Cunningham had a similar informal start. Warp encountered Cunningham through the electronic music duo Autechre, whose first release with Warp appeared on the 1992 ‘intelligent dance music’ compilation *Artificial Intelligence*. According to Beckett, Autechre ‘made a connection with [Cunningham] and were having conversations about art and about the models he was making. And it was like, how can we bring that into making a video?’ (Beckett 2016: n.p.). With both Slade and Cunningham, then, Warp forged working relationships based on an enthusiasm for particular forms of cultural expression: comic book illustration, model making, and Warp’s subgenre of experimental electronic/dance music.

In addition to working with directors Warp met informally through shared cultural interests, the label experimented with sourcing young directors via the magazine *Creative Review*. In October 2004, Warp and *Creative Review* invited readers to submit showreels to compete to make a music video for Warp. Ten competitors were selected to make films for acts such as Gravenhurst, Mira Calix, and Plaid, and the videos were made available on a *Creative Review* DVD and screened publicly at the Territoires Electroniques 2005 festival at the Vasarely Foundation in Aix-en-Provence (*Creative Review* 2004: 14-15).

Warp's collaboration with *Creative Review* is illustrative of the label's desire to work with young and unknown directors at the beginning of their careers, recalling Beckett's idea of '[getting] with these people early on.' But the collaboration with *Creative Review* also represents a way Warp's videos came about through shared interests in particular cultural practices. Not only is *Creative Review* a magazine that connects people working in the commercial creative industries, but the way the magazine brands itself on its website—'Only CR casts a critical eye on creativity in all its many forms'—projects an ethos of discernment and seriousness about creativity. This is an 'affective stance' (Grossberg 1984: 47) that resonates with Warp's tongue-in-cheek championing of 'intelligent' dance music as a subgenre of electronic/dance music that prioritised listening over dancing (Alwakeel 2009). The collaboration with *Creative Review* therefore exemplifies how Warp's music video collaborations were characterised by shared tastes and affective resonances.

Warp's interest in forging working connections based on affective alliances and through informal channels has continued in recent years. The main difference latterly is that these informal connections are mediated via digital media technologies. In order to account for the geographic dispersion of participants in a particular digital scene, Andy Bennett and Richard A. Peterson add the idea of virtuality 'as a further medium for scene involvement' in addition to scenes characterised by 'trans-local' and 'local' engagement (Bennett and

Peterson 2014: 10-12). The recent story of Aphex Twin's collaboration with 12-year-old Dublin-based videomaker Ryan Wyer is an example of how an informal network or a dispersed community of shared tastes has continued to be at the root of some of Warp's music videos even in the digital age.

In a 2015 interview Wyer and his mother (Marie O'Toole Wyer) explained how both Warp and Aphex Twin (Richard D. James) encountered Wyer's work by watching the videos he'd made to accompany Aphex Twin tracks such as 'Lechin' from *Ambient Sounds Volume II* (1994), which he uploaded to his YouTube channel.<sup>8</sup> Warp sent Aphex Twin's most recent EP *Cheetah* to Wyer and asked him to make a video for a song of his choosing from the EP. Warp's only instructions to Wyer were 'to do what [he] did best' (Redding 2016: n.p.), hinting at Warp's advocacy of artistic freedom. The final result is Wyer's video for 'CIRKLON3 [Колхозная mix]' featuring Wyer, his friends and family dancing outside their houses, wearing Aphex Twin T-shirts with the distinctive 'A' logo and masks of James's grimacing face from the artwork for his 1996 album *Richard D. James*.

Warp's and James's collaboration with Wyer is thus an example of an artefact generated by an 'affective community'. This idea, developed by Simon Frith, has the potential, according to Driver and Bennett, to disrupt certain 'homological interpretations of musical taste and affect' in promoting 'new forms of collectivity and connectivity' that are 'not tied to pre-existing notions of community grounded in class and tradition' (Driver and Bennett 2015: 101). The on-line collaboration of Warp, James, and Wyer for was based on 'shared participation' in the music of Aphex Twin. It echoes the connections of taste and affect that were rooted in specific areas of Sheffield's nightlife or in the (ironic) ethos of brand seriousness in the collaboration with *Creative Review*.

While such theories of affective taste-communities challenge 'pre-existing notions of community grounded in class and tradition', it is worth noting the continuities regarding



social identity that figure in these communities, be they virtual or local. The electronic/dance music scene in Sheffield in the early 1990s tended to be male-dominated and, despite its origins in the racially mixed club nights described by DJ Parrot above (and its more far-reaching origins in the black and gay communities of the United States), Warp's brand of electronic/dance music up to 2004 was a genre dominated by white men and cult 'nerdiness.'<sup>9</sup> In the July 2016 interview for *Creature Culture*, for example, Wyer's mother highlighted similarities between James and her son: 'Richard [James] likes to stay out of the limelight and is quite private with a quirky sense of humour—actually very like Ryan. Ryan loves his own space and doesn't really care about what others think of him. So they have very similar personalities' (Redding 2016: n.p.). Though Warp, James, and Wyer are not rooted in the same class or tradition, and are separated by geographic and generational differences, the stereotype of the solitary male technology enthusiast—the nerdish fan claiming cultural capital with fan-produced content—binds these agents discursively. They are cult practitioners whose heritage reaches back to the sharing of print magazines in cult fan circles and the 'nerd interests' of computers, science fiction, and fantasy.<sup>10</sup>

What emerges, then, from this description of Warp's music video commissioning is a shift away from the informal networks around electronic/dance music in Sheffield, towards the likes of Slade, Cunningham, readers of *Creative Review* and more recently, Wyer. Significantly, this trajectory coincided with the honing of Warp's identity as a label associated with the 'intelligent' dance music of Aphex Twin, Squarepusher, and Autechre, which is best represented on the 'Warp Vision' DVD of 1989-2004. Furthermore, what seems to link these practitioners from the 'Warp Vision' era is genre or, more loosely, a 'cluster of sense' (Straw 2010: 215) that involves electronic/dance music and the male nerd/'cult fan' identity that coalesces around notions of technological innovation, video games, comic book illustrations, science fiction, horror, retro futurism, and sinister humour.

## **‘House Style’, Genre, and Gender**

In her 2010 collection of interviews with female electronic musicians titled *Pink Noises*, Tara Rodgers highlights how the ‘terms *technology* and *music* are often marked as male domains, and the trenchancy of associated gendered stereotypes seems to gain force when these fields converge in electronic music’ (Rodgers 2010: 2). In Rodgers’ experience, women tend not to feature in electronic music magazines and the online tech/gear forums where electronic/dance musicians ‘go’ to exchange ideas have been male-dominated (Rodgers 2010: 3). Rodgers notes too how the genre’s history has been written according to the narrative strands of Futurism and Cold War popular culture, inflected by militaristic language (‘triggers,’ ‘controllers,’ and so on) and sexist imagery. ‘The very act of making electronic music,’ she writes, ‘thus unfolds with reference to high-tech combat, shot through with symbols of violent confrontation and domination’ (Rodgers 2010: 7).

Likewise, McLeod highlights that the ‘overwhelming majority of the rave promoters, DJs, and musical artists in the electronic/dance music scenes in the late 1980s and the 1990s were male’ (McLeod 2012 [2001]: 303; see also Stirling 2016; cf. Pini 2012). And both Beckett and Shadforth suggest that the early Warp scene was male-dominated. Beckett remembers:

It was definitely a male dominated scene. You used to have the shop as well and that used to be just so male dominated. So geeky. It was a bit of an event if a woman came into the shop and started buying music, to be honest (Beckett 2016: n.p.).

When I asked Beckett why this was, he said:

[...] I think because it was so technology based, that was maybe the barrier into that, because the guys had geeked out on the computers and the equipment then they got over through that barrier and started making music (Beckett 2016: n.p.).

It is worth noting that Warp and/or electronic/dance music did not deliberately exclude women. In fact, Warp regularly employed women in its office from its earliest days; Chantal Francesca Passamonte (also known as Mira Calix) is a notable exception to the rule of male-dominance in both the electronic/dance music genre and Warp; and Warp have championed the work of Shadforth from the start of her career. However, Beckett's observation about guys who 'geek out on computers and equipment' draws our attention to the dominant characteristic of electronic/dance music fan practice and closely links Warp's visual aesthetic to the tradition of cult fandom discussed above. So how do the dynamics of genre, gender, and affective community play out in relation to Warp's music videos from the 1989-2004 era? Specifically, what is the relationship between the shared tastes of the affective community, the male dominance of the Warp sub-scene, and the label's 'house style'?

Rodgers' reference to images of Futurism and Cold War popular culture, as well as the militaristic, male-coded language are indeed amongst the main visual themes in the videos on the 'Warp Vision' collection. Promos for acts such as Sweet Exorcist, LFO, and Aphex Twin contain at least three visual elements that connect with the issues I have discussed. First, the use of animation and found-looking objects reflect the informality and low-budget aesthetics of Warp's early videos. Secondly, their inclusion of human bodies and physical movement (especially in 'Testone') emphasises electronic/dance music's connection to the dance floor and bodily pleasure. Thirdly, the videos tend to foreground images of technology, technological innovation, and science fiction, as observed in Cocker and

Wallace's video for Sweet Exorcist's 'Testone' (above). Echoing Rodgers' observation, the main fields converging in this example are indeed that of music and technology, as well as the physicality of dance and the club itself, evoked in the 'strobing' style of the editing.

The video for LFO's eponymous single ('LFO,' 1991) directed and produced by Cocker and filmed by John Foxx, Penny Downes, Paul Plowman and Gary Smith, features images of microchip boards or diagrams thereof, as well as the use of code-like-looking text similar to that in 'Testone'. Significantly, the images of technological innovation that appear in 'LFO' refer to the history of the moving image. The video opens with footage of an eye and a picture frame, two signifiers of the visual field. These signifiers merge with the genre-driven emphasis on both technology and the body by including footage of Eadweard Muybridge's nineteenth-century moving images of the human body. The track's characteristic looping motifs and repetitive rhythms lend themselves to the stop-motion style used to animate the moving bodies (sign-language hands and Muybridge's leaping figures). The incorporation of barcodes in 'LFO' could on the one hand suggest the DIY, collage aesthetic seen in 'Testone' and Cocker's video for 'On.' But the appearance of barcode and microchip boards, and perhaps even code more generally, connects with Warp's long-time collaboration with the Designers Republic (TDR), the Sheffield-based graphic design firm founded by Ian Anderson in 1986 that designed several Warp album sleeves.<sup>11</sup>

The basis of TDR's aesthetic derived from images of consumer culture, Manga-influenced cartoon characters, meaningless Japanese script, and text styles derived from instruction manuals where the design process is usually inconspicuous. In a 2009 article on TDR, design writer Rick Poynor described TDR's 'graphic mannerisms' as:

endless sheets of replicating, hardcore graphic texture - rules, arrows, graph paper, pictograms; an array of abstracts possibly arbitrary, geometrical shapes; and photos

treated by assorted graphic filters to give the subject matter a detached, 21st-century techno ambiance (Poynor 2001: 4-5).

The kinds of images in TDR's graphic design, then—the 'rules, arrows, graph paper, pictograms'—overlap with the images of, broadly, the technological making of things in early Warp videos such as 'Testone' and 'LFO,' including patch cords, switchboards, and code in both videos. What is more, Poynor describes these images as creating 'a detached, 21st-century techno ambiance.' The technicity or scientific quality of these images finds an analogy in music that is both repetitive and created using electronic instruments - synthesizers, drum machines, and samplers. Indeed, in his article on Autechre, Brett observes that the duo insists their music has no meaning beyond the equipment they use to make it. 'This formalist claim,' writes Brett, 'is reinforced by the group's cryptic track titles, non-representational album-cover art, and their performances which take place in total darkness to prevent audiences from knowing the specifics' (Brett 2015: 7). Therefore, not only do TDR's collage techniques complement the cut-up styles of the early Warp videos but they relate to the anonymity cultivated by acts such as Autechre and Aphex Twin, whose track titles are often deliberately cryptic.

In relation to the themes Rodgers identifies in electronic dance music's historiography and Cold War popular culture, TDR/Anderson demonstrate an interest in the aesthetic of what he calls 'the future,' an idea that the following description highlights with its reference to 1960s television programmes:

The aesthetic was a visual shorthand distilled from sci-fi films, television series, comics and books, from *The Lost Planet* to *Doctor Who*, to Gerry Anderson's *Thunderbirds*, *UFO*, *Joe 90* and *Captain Scarlet*. It was the moon landing and every

airbrushed paperback cover for a Robert A. Heinlein or Isaac Asimov novel. It was NASA, and optical character recognition ... We aimed to create stuff that immediately 'looked' futuristic (Anderson in Farrelly 2009: n.p.).

Anderson's nostalgic image of the 'future', then, drew heavily on Cold War popular culture, particularly the sci-fi films and television series from the 1960s, artefacts at the centre of the techno-geek archive.<sup>12</sup> This vision of the 'future' is notably retro, recalling earlier acts such as Kraftwerk, who appear on the sleeve for Warp's *Artificial Intelligence* record and thus function as another touchstone in the techno-geek lineage.

The early Warp videos for 'Testone' and 'LFO,' as well as TDR's graphic design and the technologically-imbued anonymity cultivated by Autechre and Aphex Twin, are all components that coalesce to produce electronic/dance music's visual world as an agglomeration of technology and technological innovation, science fiction, video games, space exploration, and utilitarian graphics, heavily inflected with nostalgic visions of the 'future' inherited from Cold War popular culture and video games. These themes, I suggest, respond to and reinforce suppositions about electronic/dance music as a genre and its affiliated audience. While Warp did not deliberately cultivate a male-dominated image, the male techno-geek stereotype is nevertheless attached to or is articulated by the 'intelligent dance music' subgenre (which has origins in Sheffield's more diverse electronic/dance music scene) and figures as a discursive trope in the heritage of cult fandom. Indeed, the idea that 'intelligent' dance music's affective community tends to be associated with the gendered community of male techno-geeks is something that Warp's 'house style' engages with explicitly. Thus, another important component of Warp's 'house style' is its ironic take on this 'masculine' sensibility, which allows Warp to simultaneously claim and deny these white male associations.

In addition to use of technological and cult signifiers in Warp's music videos, a number of the later videos from the 'Warp Vision' era employ dark humour, and here again Rodgers' emphasis on the masculine coding of electronic/dance music language is pertinent. Track titles such as 'Come on My Selector' (1997) and 'Come to Daddy' (1997) foreground and satirize the male-dominance of the 'intelligent' dance music subgenre,<sup>13</sup> and the best video examples are those directed by Cunningham and Slade. In Slade's 'Donkey Rhubarb' (1995) giant, luridly coloured teddy bears bearing the face of James thrust exaggeratedly and dance in oversized diapers, and their mingling with children throws the benignity of their cuddliness into question. This video exemplifies a characteristically Warp-style sense of humour, one that is sexualised, irreverent, and often violent. Slade's work for 'Donkey Rhubarb' initiated what would become a signature 'look' for their Aphex Twin videos—the leer of James's face on other bodies. This appears on the little people in 'Come to Daddy' and the female dancers in 'Windowlicker,' and features in Aphex Twin's promotional literature as well as in Wyer's 'CIRKLON3 [Колхозная mix].'<sup>14</sup>

Cunningham's videos similarly employ dark humour, specifically parodic humour shot through sex and violence. When discussing the opening sequence for 'Windowlicker,' Cunningham says he made a concerted effort to be funny since audiences missed the intended humour of 'Come to Daddy.'<sup>15</sup> 'Windowlicker' trades on satirical depictions of race, gender, and hip-hop. The video opens with two self-styled gangstas, played by Gary Cruz and Marcus Morris, driving in their convertible hoping to get laid and boasting hyperbolically about their mounting readiness 'to fuck.' The two men parody the pimp boast in a way that borders on minstrelsy, only to be usurped by the white male anti-hero (James), who surprises us all with his ability to both dance and seduce, albeit in a fittingly awkward way with overtones of Michael Jackson. The sexualised representation of women in the video, dancing bikini-clad in a champagne spume, is disavowed by the way they assume James's grotesque face.

‘Windowlicker’ is therefore a strong example of the way the ‘Warp Vision’-era videos employed irony and parody to both claim and deny the white male-centricity of its electronic/dance music. That this humour is more specific to Warp and electronic/dance music than Cunningham’s other work is evident by analysing his videos for Madonna, Björk, and Portishead, which do not employ the same ironic commentary on raced masculinity.

Cunningham’s other videos for Warp similarly foreground a taste for both horror and the grotesque. In a ‘Promo of the Month’ feature on ‘Come to Daddy,’ the writers described Cunningham as ‘the undisputed horrormeister of music video,’ referring to his videos for Autechre’s ‘Second Bad Vilbel’ (1995) and ‘Back with the Killer Again’ by non-Warp artists the Auteurs (*Promo* October 1997: 4-5). Cunningham’s video for ‘Come to Daddy’ does indeed weave tropes and images from cult horror and sci-fi. Sinister characters wearing the grimacing mask of James run amok on a twilight, run-down council estate, and a demon awakes after a vicious dog urinates on a discarded television. More specifically, Cunningham highlights how the phrase ‘come to daddy’ derives from the 1987 film *Hellraiser* and discusses some of the horror films from which he borrowed when making the video:

I may have subconsciously been thinking about the old *Village of the Damned* movie, with the creepy kids, but basically I was trying to capture the flavour of those early Eighties horror movies that I watched too many of as a kid (Cunningham in *Promo* October 1997: 4-5)<sup>16</sup>

Recalling earlier Warp videos with a retro sci-fi aesthetic, *Promo* suggested Cunningham’s use of prosthetics in his videos—specifically, the masks in ‘Come to Daddy’ and the mask of the evil spirit character—may have derived from Cunningham’s work on the *Alien* films (*Promo* October 1997: 4-5). Cunningham worked first for Clive Barker on



*Spitting Image* as a sculptor, as well as on *Alien 3* (1992) and with Danny Cannon on *Judge Dredd* (1995). Cunningham's early career involved work with Stanley Kubrick, as well as (like Slade) working as a comic-book illustrator. Industrial robotics is another significant influence and is evident in Björk's 'All is Full of Love' (1997) and Autechre's 'Second Bad Vilbel' (1995), which both have a conspicuous Kubrick/*2001*-look with 1970s-style lighting and use of white plastic.<sup>17</sup>

In answer to the question, 'does Warp have a house style?' then, it is possible to identify a number of recurrent trends or motifs amongst the label's most celebrated videos, particularly those on the 'Warp Vision' DVD of videos from 1989-2004. These trends include: the foregrounding of technology and technological innovation, video games, science fiction and 1950s/1960s visions of the 'future,' horror, violence, subversive humour, and a tendency to satirise the prevalent masculinity associated with electronic/dance music of the era. What is more, these visual motifs resonate with what Rodgers observes about electronic/dance music's historiography, which tends to use Futurism, Cold War popular culture, militaristic language, and 'masculine' themes that 'gain force' when the fields of music and technology 'converge in electronic music' (Rodgers 2010: 2). Therefore, the visual language of Warp's music videos is to a certain extent rooted in the backgrounds of the directors, especially Cunningham who worked in both horror and sci-fi before films and television before directing music videos, and with Slade who worked as an illustrator and with computer graphics with Autechre and Jess Scott-Hunter. At the same time, the style of Warp's music videos responds to the electronic/dance music genre, particularly regarding the convergence of technology and music, and their relationship to techno-geek communities.

As Vernallis suggests, 'different modes of address are available to different constituencies' in the world of music video (Vernallis 2013: xiii), and both Brackett (2005; 2015) and Vernallis (2013: 73) write about the entanglement of social constituencies and

categories of music (see also Brackett 2015: 16-22). Vernallis writes convincingly about the different modes of address favoured by different pop music genres in music videos, and the way these modes of address intersect with issues of ethnicity in particular. For example, rap videos tend to take place in the street or feature smooth chrome surfaces, whereas indie videos are often set in boxy rooms in low-rent quarters with shabby furniture and green wallpaper, and metal videos use abandoned industrial spaces ‘shot in long shot with blue tint’ (Vernallis 2013: 77-9).

It is worth noting here the overlap between metal videos and some of Warp’s videos that take place in abandoned industrial spaces and/or use blue tint. When I interviewed music video producer Anna Brunoro about her work with Warp, she noted an ‘intensity’ in Warp’s videos that is both dark and comedic, and this perhaps relates to the tendency for male directors to grade their videos in a certain way:

Obviously Chris [Cunningham] graded ‘Come to Daddy’ a certain way. And then it seemed like every video was graded the same way for something like twelve years. Again, that’s a total exaggeration but I remember going to him, ‘it’s kind of crazy everyone does the same grade as you.’ Everything is very blue green. And that’s where women, and Dawn [Shadforth] again, were happy to have pink and yellow (Brunono 2016: n.p.)

What is interesting about Brunoro’s comments about colour and gender is that they just as easily relate to issues of musical genre; pop may allow for colour in a way that other genres of music (such as electronic/dance music) do not. While the grades and favoured spaces of Warp videos are certainly worth further exploration—particularly concerning the Ballardian use of institutions such as schools and hospitals, as well as liminal spaces such as

empty car parks, industrial-looking interzones and council estates—I have decided to emphasise the way Warp’s visual themes interact with or borrow from other cultural forms as a way to address the discursive and historiographic aspect of electronic/dance music and its intersection with gender, genre, and to some degree race. These images form a cluster of cultural sense: the male-dominated, technology driven genre of intelligent electronic/dance music is accompanied by, or made intelligible, using images of technology, as well as those borrowed from science fiction, horror, video games, dark colours, and dark comedy that parodies masculine sexual prowess. That this style operates according to genre (and to some extent gender) is evident in Warp’s production of more indie-oriented videos in the early 2000s. Warp is known for its work with bands such as Maxïmo Park, Grizzly Bear, and Battles, as well as female directors such as Anna Brunoro and Emily Kai Bock, and these videos notably adopt a different aesthetic style from those associated with electronic/dance music from 1989-2004.

### **Gendered Labour and Cultures of Production**

Focussing on Warp’s visual semiotics, as well as the themes that recur in media discourse, is valuable to the extent that it reveals the dominant social formation associated with Warp’s electronic dance music, that of the white male techno-geek. However, a more nuanced reading of Warp videos can perhaps be reached by looking closely at what Born calls the ‘micro-social’ level of cultural production (Born 2011: 376; see also Straw, response to Born, ‘The Social and the Aesthetic,’ 209-10), specifically the way gender figures in the day-to-day production of cultural artefacts. Looking at micro-social interactions at the level of music video production also engages Vernallis’s observation regarding the male-dominance in music video histories (Vernallis 2013: 263) and Caston’s recommendation that production studies offer a possible solution to the narrow focus on auteurism in music video (Caston

2015: 152). For the final section of this article, I would like to focus on Warp's music videos from a production studies perspective, looking more closely at issues of personnel. By mapping these different discursive fields, we can hold in productive tension the difference between the images refracted by Warp's visual language and the social connotations of intelligent electronic/dance music as a genre on the one hand, and the day-to-day micro-socialities involved in the actual making of the videos.

Although the 'Warp Vision' collection from 1989-2004 is generically mixed (including songs by Jimi Tenor and the soul-styled artist Jamie Lidell), seven of the eight stills that appear on the back of the 'Warp Vision' DVD are from electronic/dance music artists and the videos that featured most in *Promo* magazine. This includes: Aphex Twin's 'Donkey Rhubarb,' 'Come to Daddy' and 'Windowlicker'; Squarepusher's 'Come on My Selector'; as well as Plaid's 'Itsu' (directed by pleix); LFO's 'Freak' (directed by Daniel Levi); Autechre's 'Gantz Graf' (directed by Alex Rutterford); and Broadcast's 'Papercuts' (directed by Babak). Furthermore, all of the videos are directed by men and, with the exception of Mira Calix and Broadcast, the majority of the musicians are male.

However, one way to challenge the impression that Warp's videos purveyed a male aesthetic is to look more closely at the production process. In the case of the three videos from 'Warp Vision' directed by Cunningham, most of the creative and technical roles involved in making these videos were assumed by men, and those that are primarily organisational were performed by women. 'Come to Daddy,' produced by the company Black Dog, features Cunningham as director, Simon Chudoir as director of photography, Gary Knight as editor, actor Al Stokes as the demon, and men in roles such as gaffer, steadicam operator and focus puller. By contrast, Cindy Burnay produced 'Come to Daddy' with production assistance from Holly Ross. Women in other creative roles in the video include Louise Elsey, who was part of the creature fx team, Jacki Castelli as props buyer, and

actress Coral Lorne as the terrorised old woman. The stylist on ‘Come On My Selector’ was Camilla Martin. Burnay also produced ‘Windowlicker’ with production assistant Ross and the stylist was Danielle King. And, of course, ‘Windowlicker’ features several young women as (uncredited) dancers. This division of labour is fairly typical from a film industry perspective and speaks to the historical bias against women in creative roles and their tendency to assume organisational positions. A number of scholars have begun to theorise this gendered division of labour, and to discuss in more detail the experiences of women in below-the-line roles, including Vicki Mayer and Miranda Banks (2009), and the experiences of women who dance in music videos, such as Amber Johnson’s autocritography (2014) about Nelly’s ‘Country Grammar (Hot Shit)’ (2000).

We therefore have multiple ways of reading the gendered socialities of the Warp videos. At the micro-social level, concerning the day-to-day production of a music video, the division of labour falls into a fairly standardised template where women function as organisers and stylists, or as objects of ridicule (in ‘Come to Daddy’), cuteness (in ‘Come On My Selector’), or grotesque sex (in ‘Windowlicker’). Men assume creative and technical roles as directors, editors, DOPs, and cast members as well. At the macro-social level, the final product articulates a stereotypically masculine identity, drawing on cult tropes such a fondness for technological innovation, video games, sci-fi, retro futurism, horror, and darkly sexualised humour.

But there are at least three issues problematising this binary organisation of labour and creative influence. Firstly, Warp’s brand or ‘house style’ or articulation of a ‘masculine’ identity is loaded with irony and self-consciously mocks a proclivity to want to geek out about and even ‘come on’ things. Secondly, Warp has always been a progressive label that has supported women directors and musicians such as Shadforth, Brunoro, and Mira Calix. It set up the Darklight: Women Direct Horror initiative and in more recent years employed

Laura Tunstall who was responsible for commissioning videos for work by Kwes, Flying Lotus, and Battles, and has commissioned the young female director Emily Kai-Bock. Indeed, Tunstall's arrival at Warp perhaps marked a regime change and a shift in the label's 'house style.' That the 'cluster of sense' attached to Warp's videos should therefore be so narrowly 'male' perhaps says more about the demands of the market and/or the demands of musical genre (itself entangled with issues of market and gender). Finally, while the production process may replicate the standardised gendered division of labour, practitioners of both genders were involved in the production of the music videos that articulate, refract, and critique a predominantly masculine culture. This final point may be a productive starting point for thinking about female makings of masculine-coded culture.

## **Conclusion**

There are multiple lenses we can employ to analyse music video's cultural significance, including the videos' origins in specific communities and networks, questions of 'house style,' generic connotations, and divisions of labour. The answer to the question 'does Warp has a house style' is a tentative yes. Identifiable consistencies include the commissioning process, which was informed by an affective stance, as well as the recurrence of directors Cocker, Cunningham, and Slade, and even recurrent producers such as Burnay and stylists like Castelli. At a thematic level, the proclivity for sinister humour is pervasive and even cuts across genre (videos for Tenor have as much of a seedy sexualised atmosphere as that captured in 'Windowlicker'). Additional significant visual threads include sci-fi, horror, video games, and comic books, which relate both to the Warp practitioners' own interests but also respond to the 'futuristic' connotations of electronic/dance music and cultural overlaps in male-dominated techno-geek taste communities.

The Warp music videos case study presents an interesting response to the notion of the ‘affective community.’ On the one hand, the videos articulate the tastes and interests of a community held together by its affective relationship to electronic/dance music, rather than by ‘traditional’ ideas about class and/or community. On the other hand, this ‘affective community’ is neither neutral nor without the conventional markers of social identity. Gendered (and raced) dynamics figure and mutate at every level of their production: from the videos’ origins in Sheffield’s mixed music scene, to the dominance of specific directors sourced according to tastes and affective affiliations, and the gendered dynamics of the production process. While ‘affective communities’ may foster connections across conventional demarcations of social identity, this case study of Warp music’s videos demonstrates the extent to which cultural artefacts continue to articulate gendered identity positions even when the production process itself reveals a more complex picture of the realities of power and labour.

---

## Notes

1. I am using the generic label electronic/dance music as Kembrew McLeod does in his article ‘Genres, Subgenres, Sub-subgenres and More.’ See McLeod [2001] 2012: 290.
2. Charlotte Otter, ‘Warp Dives in with [adult swim] Link-Up.’ *Music Week*, April 16, 2011: 9.
3. ‘Warp Vision: The Videos 1989-2004,’ DVD, 2004.
4. The phrases ‘niche scene’ and ‘general scene’ are my translation of Straw’s distinction between *scene ouverte* and *scene restreinte* in ‘Scènes: ouvertes et restreintes,’ *Cahiers de recherche sociologique* 57 (2014): 17-32.
5. According to Rob Young, members of Cabaret Voltaire bankrolled and produced the track ‘Out of the Flesh’ by the Sheffield band Chakk, which prompted the major label MCA to offer Chakk an advance to set up a studio. This became the FON shop and studios (Young 2006: 29; for more on Sheffield’s industrial music see Reed 2013: esp. 57-84).
6. For a brief and low-quality glimpse into the Sheffield electronic/dance music scene at the beginning of the 1990s, see this television clip: ‘LFO Interview on TV and Warp,’ YouTube video, uploaded by gez varley, 1 August 2012, accessed 16 November 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JWwHvyPraz8>.
7. Slade’s videos for Aphex Twin’s ‘Donkey Rhubarb’ (1995) and LFO’s ‘Tied Up’ (1996), as well as Cunningham’s videos for Aphex Twin’s ‘Come to Daddy’ (1997) and ‘Windowlicker’ (1999), and Squarepusher’s ‘Come on My Selector’ (1997) all featured in *Promo* in the mid- to late-1990s, often in

---

their 'Promo of the Month' section. 'Come to Daddy' received the Best Overall Video Award at the 1997 CAD awards (now the British Music Video Awards) as well as technical awards for the quality of its editing and cinematography.

8. 'Aphex Twin - Lechin,' YouTube video, uploaded by epic1:40d Gaming, 4 February 2015, accessed 22 November 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-Y8WNhhWESc>. For more on YouTube and music video see Vernallis 2013: 127-55.
9. For more discussion of the name 'intelligent' dance music as it relates to race see McLeod 2012 [2001]: 303.
10. For more on the gendered and race identity of the 'nerd' see Lori Kendall, "'White and Nerdy': Computers, Race, and the Nerd Stereotype,' *The Journal of Popular Culture* 44/3 (June 2011): 505-524.
11. Anderson was a DJ, musician, and manager on the Sheffield scene (Davies 1997: n.p.).
12. A fascination for 1950s and 1960s visions of the future can also be seen in David Slade's 1994 advertisement for Warp titled, 'I Smell Quality.'
13. These titles and identities rely on a binary view of gender that may of course be disrupted by non-binary modes of gender expression.
14. This could be considered part of a broader aesthetic conversation in 1990s and early 2000s. Warp/Slade/Cunningham were not the only artists to use face mapping. Two notable examples from the 1990s/2000s include 'Where's Your Head At' by Basement Jaxx directed by Traktor (2001) and 'What's My Name?' by Snoop Dogg directed by Fab 5 Freddy (1993).
15. For Cunningham's discussion of humour in 'Come to Daddy' see the Cunningham edition of the television series 'Mirrorball,' which has since been uploaded to YouTube as 'Mirrorball - Chris Cunningham - (1999) - [Music Videos Removed],' YouTube video, uploaded by VHSfx, 23 February 2013, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XRveQy67zKg>, accessed 14 November 2016.
16. Further horror film tropes are employed in Cunningham's video for Squarepusher's 'Come on My Selector' (see *Promo's* review of October 2003: 14).
17. 'Mirrorball: Chris Cunningham,' YouTube video uploaded by VHSfx, 23 February 2013, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XRveQy67zKg>, accessed 1 November 2016.

## References

- Alwakeel, Ramzy (2009), 'IDM as a "Minor" Literature: The Treatment of Cultural and Musical Norms by 'Intelligent Dance Music,' *Dancecult: Journal of Electronic Dance Music Culture*, 1: 1, pp. 1-21.
- Banks, Miranda J. (2009), 'Gender Below the Line: Defining Feminist Production Studies,' in Mayer, Vicki, Banks, Miranda J. & Caldwell, John T. (eds.) *Production Studies: Cultural Studies of Media Industries*, New York; London: Routledge, pp. 87-96.
- Beckett, Steve (2016), Interview with the author, 11 August.



- 
- Bennett, Andy & Peterson, Richard A. (2004), *Music Scenes: Local, Translocal and Virtual*, Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press.
- Birke, Sarah (2007), 'Label Profile: Warp Records,' *Independent*, 2 November, <http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/music/features/label-profile-warp-records-398605.html> (accessed 15 August 2016).
- Born, Georgina (2011), 'Music and the materialization of identities,' *Journal of Material Culture*, 16: 4, pp. 376-388.
- Brett, Thomas (2015), 'Autechre and Electronic Music Fandom: Performing Knowledge Online through Techno-Geek Discourses,' *Popular Music and Society*, 38: 1, pp. 7-24.
- Brewster, Ben (2016), 'DJ Parrot,' *DJHistory.com*, 7 January 2005, <http://www.djhistory.com/interviews/dj-parrot> (accessed 15 August 2016).
- Caston, Emily (2012), "'Kick, Bollocks and Scramble:" An Examination of Power and Creative Decision-Making in the Production Process During the Golden Era of British Music Videos 1995-2001,' *Journal of British Cinema and Television*, 9: 1, pp. 96-110.
- Caston, Emily (2015), 'Not Another Article on the Author! God and Auteurs in Moving Image Analysis: Last Call for a Long Overdue Paradigm Shift', *Music, Sound and the Moving Image*, 9: 2, pp. 145-161.
- Collins, Nick, Schedel, Margaret & Wilson, Scott (2013), *Electronic Music*, Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Creative Review* (2004), '15 Years of Warped Visions,' October 2004, pp. 14-15.
- Fact* (2012), 'The Secret History of Warp Records,' *Fact*, 17 April 2012, <http://www.factmag.com/2012/04/17/oh-my-god-what-have-we-done-the-secret-history-of-warp-records/> (accessed 20 September 2016).

---

Frith, Simon (1981), 'The magic that can set you free: The ideology of folk and the myth of rock,' *Popular Music* 1, pp. 159-168.

Grazian, David (2013), 'Digital Underground: Musical spaces and microscenes in the postindustrial city,' in Holt, Fabian & Wergin, Carsten (eds), *Musical Performance and the Changing City: Post-industrial contexts in Europe and the United States*, New York; London: Routledge, pp. 127-151.

Grossberg, Lawrence (1984), 'Another Boring Day in Paradise: Rock and Roll and the Empowerment of the Everyday,' *Popular Music: A Year Book*, 4, pp. 225-58.

Johnson, Amber (2014), 'Confessions of a Video Vixen: My Autocritography of Sexuality, Desire, and Memory,' *Text and Performance Quarterly*, 34: 2, pp. 182-200.

Kendall, Lori (2011), "'White and Nerdy": Computers, Race, and the Nerd Stereotype,' *The Journal of Popular Culture*, 44: 3, pp. 505-524.

McLeod, Kembrew [2001] (2012), 'Genres, Subgenres, Sub-subgenres and More: Musical and Social Differentiation within Electronic/Dance Music Communities,' in Butler, Mark J. (ed.), *Electronica, Dance and Club Music*, Farnham, Surrey; Ashgate, VT: Ashgate, pp. 289-306.

Otter, C. (2011), 'Warp Dives in with [adult swim] Link-Up,' *Music Week*, 16 April, p. 9.

Pini, Maria (2012), "Women and the Early British Rave Scene", in Butler, Mark J. (ed.), *Electronica, Dance and Club Music*, Farnham, Surrey; Ashgate, VT: Ashgate, pp. 339-56.

Poynor, Rick (2001), 'Critique: Graphic Design. Vanishing Point', *Eye: The International Review of Graphic Design*, 11: 41, pp. 4-5.

Redding, Dan (2016), 'Exclusive Interview with 12 Year-Old Aphex Twin Video Director Ryan Wyer and his Mother', *Culture Creature*, 8 July, <http://www.culturecreature.com/ryan-wyer-interview-aphex-twin/> (accessed 11 August 2016).

- 
- Reed, S. Alexander (2013), *Assimilate: A Critical History of Industrial Music*, New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Reynolds, Simon (2013), 'The 20 Best Bleep Records Ever Made,' [www.factmag.com](http://www.factmag.com), 22 July 2013, <http://www.factmag.com/2013/07/22/the-20-best-bleep-records-ever-made/> (accessed 29 August 2016).
- Rodgers, Tara (2010), *Pink Noises: Women on Electronic Music and Sound*, Durham, NC.: Duke University Press.
- Shadforth, Dawn (2016), Interview with the author, 17 November.
- Stirling, Christabel (2016), "'Beyond the Dance Floor?'" Gendered Publics and Creative Practices in Electronic Dance Music', *Contemporary Music Review*, 35: 1, pp. 130-49.
- Straw, Will (1991), 'Systems of Articulation, Logics of Change: Communities and Scenes in Popular Music', *Cultural Studies*, 5: 3, pp. 368-88.
- Straw, Will (1997), 'Sizing Up Record Collections: Gender and Connoisseurship in Rock Music Culture', in Whiteley, Sheila (ed.), *Sexing the Groove: Popular Music and Gender*, London; New York: Routledge, pp. 3-16.
- Straw, Will (2010), 'Cultural Sociology and the Generative Matrix: A Response to Georgina Born,' *Cultural Sociology*, 4: 2, pp. 209-216.
- Straw, Will (2014), 'Scènes: ouvertes et restreintes', *Cahiers de recherche sociologique*, 57, pp. 17-32.
- Vernallis, Carol (2004), *Experiencing Music Video: Aesthetics and Cultural Context*, New York: Columbia University Press.
- Vernallis, Carol (2013), *Unruly Media: YouTube, Music Video, and the New Digital Cinema*, New York: Oxford University Press.
- Young, Rob (2006), *Warp: Labels Unlimited*, London: Black Dog.